



Beginning African American Research: 1865 to the Present

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This class focuses on African American research from 1865 (after the Civil War) to the present. To be successful in locating your ancestors back to slavery, you must first locate **any** and **all** records for your ancestor and **each** of their family members (parents, siblings, etc.). Verification of information and finding additional clues on other family members' records are essential in identifying your ancestors correctly. It will also help in determining possible slave owners.

Before Researching

Check Home Sources and Ask Family Members—Records to look for are: obituaries, birth records, death records, journals and diaries, funeral programs, family Bible, and family letters. Ask older family members about who might have these home sources and anything they know about your ancestors.

Research Strategies

Strategy #1: Go from the known to the unknown—Always verify as much family information as you can with actual records. Unknown nicknames or failing memories of family members can lead you down the wrong research path or keep you from locating your ancestors in other records. Never take someone's word for it. Instead, prove it, if possible. Even if you already have your ancestor's birthdate from family information, try to verify the information.

Remember—Work back in time—Don't jump to your ancestor's birth record. Always start with the death record and work back in time. For example, search in the following in order:

1. Death record of ancestor
2. Each census year the ancestor was alive
3. Marriage record of ancestor
4. Birth record of ancestor, if available

Strategy #2: Search all possible records—When researching ancestors, locate all possible records created during their life time. Records include death records, marriage records, birth records, census records, city directories, church records, land records, and probate records. This also includes searching records that cover the same event, such as if you find your ancestor's cemetery record, you should also locate a death certificate (or register entry), obituary, and funeral program. Additional information and clues may be given on these records to help distinguish your ancestor in other records.

Strategy #3: Find all known family members—Locate each known family member directly related to your ancestor in every possible record. This includes, the ancestor's children, siblings, uncles, aunts, and cousins even nieces and nephews. These records can either verify

or give additional information, which will assist in determining family members, proof of relationship, and where they were from. The more you know about the structure of the family, the more success you will have in locating your family in other records.

Strategy #4: Name Changes—Most African Americans in slavery did not have a surname. When they were freed, they could take any surname they wanted. Surnames could come from former slave owners, surnames of people they admired, such as Lincoln or Washington, or any name they preferred. Members of the same family unit may have different surnames. Surnames may even change from one census year to another depending on individual's desire.

Major Records and Websites

The following is a list of major records with corresponding websites.

Census Records—1790 to 1940:

Websites to indexes and images:

- Familysearch.org (free):
<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list#page=1&countryId=1&recordType=Census>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at Family History Centers aka FHCs):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/group/usfedcen>

Military Draft Records:

World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918

Websites to indexes and images:

- Familysearch.org (free): <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1968530>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs): <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=6482>

World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942

Websites to indexes and images:

- FamilySearch.org (free): <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1861144>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs): <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1002>

Death Records—Various:

Social Security Death Index (SSDI) and Social Security Application

Websites to indexes:

- FamilySearch.org (free, SS numbers included except for the past 3 years):
<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1202535>
- Fold 3 (free, most current, no SS numbers): <http://go.fold3.com/ssdi/>
- Ancestry.com (free sign-in required for SS# for before 2004):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=3693>
- To order a SS-5 application online: <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps9/eFOIA-FEWeb/internet/main.jsp>

State Death Certificates

Websites containing links to death index databases and images:

- AfriGeneas website (free, indexes): (African American specific, death index database – small but always growing!): <http://www.afrigenes.com/drdb/>
- Online Searchable Death Indexes and Records (links to \$ and free online indexes and images): <http://www.deathindexes.com/>

- Historical Records at FamilySearch.org (Free):
https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list#page=1®ion=UNITED_STATES
- FamilySearch Wiki - How to Find U.S. Death Records (links to \$ and free online indexes and images and where to order copies of certificates):
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Death_Records

Cemetery Records

Websites to indexes:

- African American Cemeteries Online (free, growing website):
<http://africanamericancemeteries.com/>
- FindaGrave.com (free): <http://www.findagrave.com/>
- Interment.net (free): <http://interment.net/>
- BillionGraves on FamilySearch.org (free):
<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/2026973>
- USGenWeb.org (free; choose a state, then a county): <http://www.usgenweb.org/>

Obituaries

How to find newspapers:

Finding aids for African American newspapers:

- *Negro Newspapers on Microfilm* – Guide is online: <http://catalog.hathitrust.org>
Once you find the newspaper, go to <http://worldcat.org> to find microfilm location
- *Bibliographic Checklist of African American Newspapers* by Barbara Henritze

Finding aids for general newspapers:

- Chronicling American by the Library of Congress. (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)
- *N. W. Ayers & Son's American Newspaper Annual*, digitized on the Library of Congress website. (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vols/loc.gdc.sr.sn91012091/default.html>). Select a year to see if a newspaper exists. After you find a newspaper title, search for it online.

Websites to newspapers links and images online:

- Accessible Archives (\$, every-name search of 8 early African American newspapers):
<http://www.accessible.com/accessible/archives.jsp>
- Online Historical Newspapers Site (free, links to historical newspapers both \$ and free):
<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/>
- Historical Newspapers Online (free, links to newspapers):
<http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/hist/onlinenewspapers.html>
- Chronicling American by the Library of Congress (free): <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>
- Newspaper Archive (\$, free at FHCs, newspaper images):
<http://www.newspaperarchive.com>
- Genealogy Bank (NewsBank) (\$, newspaper images): go through your public library website
- Ancestry (\$, free at FHCs, newspaper images):
<http://www.ancestry.com/search/rectype/periodicals/news/>
- Google News Archive (free):
https://news.google.com/news/advanced_news_search?as_drrb=a
- ProQuest Newstand (\$, newspaper images): go through your public library website

- Many states have digitizing newspaper projects, which are usually accessible for free. See this FamilySearch.org wiki article:
https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Digital_Historical_Newspapers

Public libraries often have an obituary request program for a small fee. Contact the public library in the town where the ancestor died. List of public libraries: <http://www.publiclibraries.com/>

Marriage Records:

Websites to indexes and images:

- AfriGeneas website marriage database (Free, small but always growing!):
<http://www.afriGeneas.com/marriages/>
- Freedmen's Bureau marriages online (Free, some extracted marriage records taken from Freedmen's Bureau records): <http://www.freedmensbureau.com/marriages.htm>
- Online Birth and Marriage Records Indexes for US (links to \$ and free online databases):
<http://www.germanroots.com/vitalrecords.html>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/category.aspx?cat=34>
- Historical Records at FamilySearch.org (Free):
https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list#page=1®ion=UNITED_STATES
- FamilySearch Wiki - How to Find U.S. Marriage Records (links to \$ and free online indexes and images and where to order copies of certificates):
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Marriage_Records

Birth Records:

Websites:

- Online Birth and Marriage Records Indexes for US (links to \$ and free databases):
<http://www.germanroots.com/vitalrecords.html>
- Historical Records at FamilySearch.org (Free):
https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list#page=1®ion=UNITED_STATES
- FamilySearch Wiki - How to Find U.S. Birth Records (links to \$ and free online indexes and images and where to order copies of certificates):
https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/How_to_Find_United_States_Birth_Records

Records Unique to African Americans:

Freedmen's Bureau, 1865–1872

Websites for Freedmen's Bureau Records:

Records include Marriages, Labor Records, Field Office Records and Correspondence

- Freedmen's Bureau Online (Free, index only):
<http://www.freedmensbureau.com/freedmens-bureau>
- Marriages, FamilySearch.org (Free, index and images):
<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1414908>
- FamilySearch.org (Free, mostly browse only images) for states including:
- Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Delaware, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas
https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list?page=1®ion=UNITED_STATES
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs, indexes and images):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1105>

Freedman's Bank Records

Websites to indexes and images:

- FamilySearch.org (Free): <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1417695>
- HeritageQuestonline.com (\$, free at FHCs):
<http://www.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/index>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs): <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=8755>

U.S. Colored Troops Service and Pension Records – Civil War

Websites to indexes and images:

Service records

- FamilySearch.org (Free, index only): <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1932431>
- Fold3.com (\$, free at FHCs, index and images): http://www.fold3.com/category_268/
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs, index and images):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1107>

Pension records

- FamilySearch.org (Free, index only): <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1919699>
- Ancestry.com (\$, free at FHCs, index only):
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=4654>
- Fold3.com (\$, free at FHCs, index and 11% images):
 - Index: http://www.fold3.com/browse.php#249|hh_q9kMjO
 - Images: <http://www.fold3.com/browse.php#249|h3sRqE4nQ>

Southern Claims Commission

Websites to index and images:

- Fold3.com (\$, free at FHCs): <http://www.fold3.com/browse.php#34|>

More resources on African American Research:

- FamilySearch Wiki – African American pages:
https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/African_American_Research
- Afrigeneas.com (Beginner's Guide): <http://www.afrigeneas.com/guide/>
- Afrigeneas.com (Library of articles on African American Research):
<http://www.afrigeneas.com/library/>